

### “A GOODbye”

Saying goodbye is always hard when you love the person who is going away. I'm sure most of you have experienced the emptiness that begins to overcome us as we share one more hug and kiss before going our separate ways. I remember saying goodbye to my oldest daughter Maddie a few years ago as she was traveling back to Concordia Irvine to begin an around-the-world trip that would last the entire semester. It was late July as we made our way to RDU. We parked and I helped her load up her giant backpack. As we walked towards the terminal that empty feeling began to sink in. My little girl was literally traveling around the world and I wouldn't see her until December. It was hard, but we hugged and kissed and said our goodbyes.

I would make that trip to RDU a lot over the next few years as Maddie travelled back to school. By the time she was a senior, I would make that trip not only with her, but with her sister Isabelle too as she began her freshmen year at Irvine. In fact, I'm still making that trip as Isabelle begins her senior year in a couple of months, and Maddie and her husband now live in Phoenix. And even though you would think I would be used to it by now, I still feel that emptiness. I still struggle with the reality of not being in the same place as them for months at the time.

That's the way it is for those we love, isn't it? If we've been away from them, and then, are suddenly with them, we sure don't want them to leave again. I'm sure it was that way for the disciples. I mean, think about emotional roller coaster they had been on. Just about the time they started to process that their friend and teacher had been crucified, died, and buried, the tomb was found to be empty! Jesus was alive! And he spent time with them, appearing to them over 40 days. He ate with them, probably laughed with them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. Things with Jesus were really starting to settle in again. But

then he starts saying things like “stay in Jerusalem.” He gives them instructions and tells them they would be clothed with power from on high. They had to know something was brewing, and this must have been really tough. I can imagine Peter or John saying something like, “It sounds like you’re leaving again...don’t do that to us....please stay!” But Jesus had done everything that needed to be done for salvation, not only for them, but for all people, and he would be heading home. Paul writing to the Ephesians sums it up this way: “God the Father raised Christ up from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority.” Jesus was going to ascend. But he had plans for the disciples as well. And those plans were crystal clear. They would be his witnesses proclaiming repentance and forgiveness in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem all the way to the ends of the earth. So with everything in place, Jesus was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Now, we might hear this and think the disciples should have been devastated. I mean, it sure seems like this goodbye had to have been anything but good. But that’s just not the case. Because our gospel reading from Luke says that after Jesus ascended, the disciples not only worshiped him, but returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Now how could they do that? I mean with all they had experienced with Jesus, who seemed to be in and out of their lives, when he leaves them once again, they’re joyful. Well that’s what an understanding of Christ’s mission brings —joy. And how did they come to finally get it? Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And with that, they finally got the full implications of what he had accomplished in his time on earth. Now they were to be his witnesses, and for them, there could be no higher calling.

That’s the same thing he’s done for you and me. On our own, we don’t understand anything that has to do with God or eternal life. I mean, do you really think any of us could come up with or even comprehend God’s plan of salvation that culminated with Jesus dying and rising to pay for our sins? No! But that’s not our job. He sends the Holy Spirit to create and sustain our faith in Christ—to trust in what he did, and to believe and know that he is the Savior from sin— all

through an understanding of his holy word. And then he commands us to be his witnesses.

So, even though we might not have ever set foot in Jerusalem, or never met any of the disciples, we have the great privilege of becoming like them. And just in case you're wondering if there's still work to be done, the answer is yes! There's still preaching to be done. There's still witnessing to be done. How do we know that for sure? We heard the angels in our first reading from Acts say it like it is. Jesus is going to come back in the same way that he left—with the clouds. It may be today. It may be tomorrow. It may be 2000 years from now. We don't know. But we do know that as long as he hasn't come back, that as long as we are still here, it means we have the work of proclaiming and living his word and love.

We have that work to do right here in Wake Forest. We have that work to do throughout our county, state, and nation. We have it to do around the world. In all of these places—in every place—we have to bring what we have witnessed in God's Word to all people. Because here's the thing. There are people that don't know their Savior—that's an obvious one, right? But there are also people who have forgotten their Savior. And there are people who think they know their Savior, but are very wrong about who he is, or what he's done. They all need to hear. And you and I are the ones to bring it to them. I know that might sound too scary or too hard for some of us. It might not even sound like a priority for others. But this is not my idea. It's our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord's.

So what do we do? Well, lots of things. We can support our missionaries. We can support our called workers here in our congregation with prayer and encouragement, that they may reach people right here in our neighborhoods. We can do the same for those workers who have come out of our congregation and are serving in churches around the country like Matt Slaybaugh, Ryan Pfendler, and Maddie Gong. We can be intentional about connecting with current students like Isabelle, and soon to be Alexis, who are pursuing called positions within our churches and schools. And we can also encourage our current youth to consider vocations in the church.

But it's not just our church workers who need our prayers, encouragement, and support. It's all of us because we all have been given Christ's command to be his witnesses. It doesn't have to be difficult or comprehensive. A lot of times it's just a matter of telling others what we've seen and heard—witnessing to what we know is true. We don't need to get weird about it or pushy. But if given the opportunity, we invite people to see for themselves. We invite them to worship or Bible Class. We invite them to bring their questions and we work together to find the answers.

You know, the disciples really took the whole witnessing thing up a notch once they didn't see Jesus anymore. And I think it was because they had to do it by faith in the one who they knew ruled over all. The one who nourished and strengthened with his means of grace. The one who made them his own.

Now, it's our turn because the same is true for us. We've seen and heard what Jesus has done, and we now live by faith in the one sitting at the right hand of God. And while his ascension might feel like a goodbye, know that it's a GOODbye. Because in the Ascension as Paul writes, "God put all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

May we be joyful in our witness as we proclaim and live his word and love.  
**Amen.**